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Hannah Shirley Helps Project Wildlife Celebrate 50th Anniversary!

Birthday for North America's oldest pygmy hippo coincides with San Diego Humane Society's golden jubilee

SAN DIEGO — North America's oldest pygmy hippopotamus is helping staff and volunteers at San Diego Humane Society celebrate the 50th anniversary of its Project Wildlife program. Coincidentally, hippo Hannah Shirley's 49th birthday falls during the golden jubilee of Project Wildlife, our region's safety net for wild animals in need.

To mark the double celebration, staff and volunteers at San Diego Humane Society's Ramona Wildlife Center threw a birthday party for Hannah Shirley on Monday, complete with a cake made out of sweet potatoes, bananas, blended fruits, greens and grains. Despite being a nocturnal animal, Hannah Shirley decided to take part and enjoy the occasion.



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Project Wildlife began in 1972 when a group of San Diegans spoke out after witnessing barn swallows being sprayed by power washers to keep them away from what was then Jack Murphy Stadium in Mission Valley. This early group of wildlife advocates decided it was time to bring wildlife to the forefront of the city's consciousness. Then, after officially incorporating as a nonprofit in 1976, Project Wildlife grew into a network of 70 satellite facilities and 600 volunteers. **The largest leap in Project Wildlife's growth came in November 2014 when it merged with San Diego Humane Society.** This merger was also one of the most meaningful milestones in San Diego Humane Society's history, representing the organization's commitment to serve all animals, companion and wild.

In March 2019, San Diego Humane Society opened a state-of-the-art 5,200-square-foot home for wildlife — the Pilar & Chuck Bahde Wildlife Center. For the first time ever, San Diego now had a facility befitting the lifesaving work performed by Project Wildlife every day. Just a year later, Project Wildlife welcomed the 13-acre Ramona Wildlife Center, where they care for apex predators including bears, mountain lions and bobcats.

Today, San Diego Humane Society's Project Wildlife program also boasts a highly skilled wildlife medicine team, including an intern program to train the next generation of wildlife veterinarians.

“Over the course of 50 years, Project Wildlife has transformed from a backyard gathering of concerned citizens into a nationally recognized leader at the forefront of wildlife rescue, rehabilitation and release,” said Dr. Gary Weitzman, president and CEO, San Diego Humane Society. “And it's all thanks to the tradition of caring San Diegans who support and sustain our lifesaving work. **Today, our wildlife experts treat nearly 13,000 wild animals each year, performing advanced medical care that would have been a dream back in 1972.**”

B-roll/photos of Hannah Shirley's Birthday for media use can be downloaded here: <https://bit.ly/3GpbUiZ>

B-roll/photos of Project Wildlife's work for media use can be downloaded here: <https://bit.ly/3g9dafb>



Suggested Tweet: North America's oldest pygmy hippo helps [@sdhumane](#) celebrate the 50th anniversary of its [#ProjectWildlife](#) program! Hannah Shirley's 49th birthday coincides with San Diego Humane Society's golden jubilee for Project Wildlife!

About San Diego Humane Society

San Diego Humane Society's scope of social responsibility goes beyond adopting animals. We offer programs that strengthen the human-animal bond, prevent cruelty and neglect, provide medical care, educate the community and serve as a safety net for all pet families. Serving San Diego County since 1880, San Diego Humane Society has campuses in El Cajon, Escondido, Oceanside, Ramona and San Diego. For more information, please visit sdhumane.org. Follow the SDHS Media Relations department on [Twitter @sdhumane](#).

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